

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to insist that their stations air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation. I consider the vertical consolidation of media companies a major danger to American democracy and the preservation of a truly free press. Up till now, it's mostly been the usurpation of precious "news" minutes for mindless promotion of the parent company's sit-coms or drama shows ("Final episode!!").

But Sinclair's move goes far beyond using the news to build audiences for their entertainment programming. Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge, and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, we get more of what's good for the bottom line and less of what we need for our democracy. Instead of something produced at "News Central" far away, it's more important that we see real people from our own communities and more substantive news about issues that matter.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them. They show why the license renewal process needs to involve more than a returned postcard.

Thank you.